



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF HIGH-SCHOOL GIRLS: ITS PROBLEMS AND ITS OPPORTUNITIES

OLIVIA POUND

Assistant Principal, Lincoln High School, Lincoln, Nebraska

Until quite recently education was regarded, not as a bit of life itself, but rather as a preparation for life. According to the old conception of the aim of education there seemed to be no need for supervising the social activities of high-school pupils. The majority of school authorities avoided, so far as possible, responsibility for the pupils' social life. It was considered a problem of the home, and concerned the school only when social activities interfered with school work. In some schools social organizations were actually forbidden; in others they were regarded as a necessary evil, tolerated merely in order to keep the pupils pacified. Consequent upon the changing views of education, a feeling has arisen among educators that the social life of the school is as important as the intellectual life, for in the social situations of the school the pupils are living in embryo many of the experiences they will have through life. Education is now regarded, not as training for future living, but as training for present living. Consequently the problem faces us of how best to utilize and develop whatever of good there has been in the multifarious clubs springing up in high schools, and of how to curb such anti-social tendencies in them as have heretofore gone unchecked. The present paper will discuss only the problems and opportunities of the social life of high-school girls.

Doubtless the problem of socializing the high-school girl seems more difficult than that of socializing the high-school boy because tradition has tended to make girls individualistic. Moreover, girls are rather timid; their lack of confidence makes them seem backward; so it is necessary for the school authorities to make an opportunity for girls to take part in the social life of the school. The school must see to it that all the girls as well as the boys are able to work efficiently through organization.

Among the first problems that high-school teachers encounter in working out a social program is the problem of the exclusive

clubs which have been traditional in most high schools. These organizations usually have a woman teacher as sponsor; their meetings are held, for the most part, in the school building; the time and frequency of meetings are as a rule regulated, and often some attempt has been made to curb not only the girls' "rushing" and lavish entertaining but also their snobbish airs. In spite of these attempts, however, clubs, which usually started as literary organizations, have become purely social and have degenerated into "near" or full-fledged "sororities," having all the faults and none of the virtues of the college fraternity. It is a very difficult matter to reconstruct these clubs so that they will contribute to the welfare of the school.

In the school with which I am most familiar there were, until recently, five such exclusive clubs which gradually became a positive harm to the school. Their activities led nowhere and caused constant friction. Many girls dropped out of school because they had been unable to "make" the clubs considered most desirable. Friendships of a lifetime were frequently severed, and girls of sterling worth who did not seem quite socially available were rudely snubbed. After a constructive social program had been launched, these clubs were finally discontinued by action of the faculty because it was found that the launching of new organizations was blocked so long as the old, exclusive clubs remained. Girls still wanted to get into what seemed to be "the thing." It is significant that when these exclusive clubs were discontinued, the presidents said they were glad that the organizations were dead. They had been a real burden to keep going, and had prevented the girls from doing work that was worth while. The majority of the former members of these exclusive groups are now entering whole-heartedly into the democratic organizations of the school.

After the problem of winning over the exclusive girls of the school has been met, the next difficulty to be encountered is that of drawing into the social activities of the school the diffident, unattractive, and indifferent girls. These cases all have to be handled with the greatest tact, for if a girl suspects that she is considered a "problem," it is hopeless to help her. There are usually three ways of bringing such a girl out of herself. All of the girl's teachers can conspire to give her every opportunity in the classroom to take her share of responsibility in socializing the recita-

tion. When she is once aroused there, it is possible to interest her in the more general activities of the school. Another way is to interest in her case some older, attractive, and thoroughly dependable girl. Such girls can often do wonders in bringing out the most unpromising material. The best method, however, of helping girls to gain self-respect and the confidence of others is to give them some small responsibility and help them to make good. Once a girl has set herself a standard she will not fail.

The indifferent girl is usually sublimely unconscious that she has any social responsibilities. Often a girl is socially indifferent because she is of the intellectual type; books are more interesting than people to her mind. Or a girl may be indifferent because she is absorbed in social activities outside of the school, or is "offish" because she thinks everyone "has it in" for her, or because of shyness or poverty. Whatever the cause, she should, and usually, can, be reached through some activity of the school.

A more difficult problem to meet in the social life of the school is that of racial differences. Democratic as we are, there are still prevalent prejudices against either the religious beliefs or against the color of certain elements in our population. It is of the utmost importance that school authorities build up a broad spirit of toleration. Teachers who cannot put aside strong prejudices have no place in a democratic high school. That such problems can be handled justly has been proved in many schools.

The problem of a small group of colored girls in a school is difficult; but they, too, must be treated fairly. If possible, they should be encouraged to form an organization of their own. So far as possible, they should be allowed to participate in the large organizations of the school.

Lastly, there is the problem of social standards. This involves the whole question of social usage, chaperonage, dancing, and the like. This question depends largely on the social standards of the community. What the school can do is to create a wholesome atmosphere with the pupils so interested in purposeful activities that they will be considerate, clean-minded, and sensible. It has been said that the independence of American children tends to make them rude and inconsiderate. If this is true, the school must do what it can to inculcate in the pupils simple, straightforward, considerate manners.

Before it is possible to judge which social activities of a school should be fostered and which suppressed, some definite criteria should be determined upon, by which the value of such organizations may be measured. In general, it is safe to say that social activities that do not "carry on," that do not in some way promote growth, are unworthy of the time and attention of any school. Judged by this standard there are some organizations making more for socialization than others, but any pupil organization ought in some way to contribute to the recognized aims of secondary education if it is to be tolerated by the school.

Aside from the usual class organizations, the most democratic groups in our high schools are those that to some degree participate in the government of the school. They are also valuable because they give the pupils some actual training in citizenship. In these co-operative organizations the officers are chosen from class or session room groups so that it is almost impossible for cliques to control them. There is usually an equal number of girls and boys on the council of these co-operative bodies so that the girls meet on an equal footing with the boys. They assume equal responsibilities with the boys and contribute to the same degree in solving such school problems as are within their jurisdiction. The girls have always proved, so far as my experience goes, equal to the responsibilities placed upon them. If anything, they are more serious than the boys, and realize more fully the importance of their work.

Among the activities carried on by the student council of the Lincoln High School, Lincoln, Nebraska, during the past year are the organizing of matinee parties on alternating Fridays, the preparation of an all-school carnival which netted \$875.09, and the collecting of the records of all the former high-school students who served in the recent war. The council has also been responsible for the order in the cafeteria. Toward the close of the second semester last year the council assisted the principal in familiarizing with the building all pupils of the eighth grades who were to enter the high school this fall. At the time when the proposed organization of the league of nations was first made public, the council organized discussions of the topic in the home rooms, had a prominent speaker discuss the subject in the general school assembly, and finally had a vote of the school taken on the question. The result of the vote, endorsing the proposed league, was sent to Presi-

dent Wilson. The council also wrote to the pupils of other schools of the state urging them to carry on a similar campaign of education on the subject. In all of these activities the girls of the council did as valuable work as the boys.

Along with these general organizations of the whole student body there have grown up in many schools clubs composed entirely of girls. Sometimes these clubs take the form of a girls' athletic association as in the Richmond High School, Richmond, Indiana. Sometimes they are designed to bring about proper dress and to correct the manners of too boisterous girls, as the Merrill Club of West Division High School, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. More often, however, the all-girls' organizations undertake many activities. Through these it is possible to draw every girl into the social life of the school.

The Washington Irving High School, New York City, in addition to the numerous activities carried on heretofore, contributed during the year 1917-18 a remarkable amount of war work. They made knitted garments, hospital supplies, surgical dressings, and between September, 1917 and February, 1918 raised \$1,567.63. This money was spent chiefly in purchasing the material for the contributions mentioned above.

The Girls Club of the Franklin High School, Seattle, Washington, has a wide variety of activities and interests. The officers of the club work through the school roll, record the name and capacity of each girl in school, and try to interest her in the line of work for which she is best fitted. The members of the club encourage and manage all girls' athletics. They take charge of lost and found articles, care for all girls who are ill, and keep flowers in all the rooms of the school. At Christmas and Thanksgiving the girls decorate the building and collect and distribute clothing and food among the needy of the city. The girls arrange programs for their club functions and repeat them at charitable institutions. Some of the girls keep in touch with all former Franklin High School boys in the service. They also write notes to all girls who have been absent from school two days, send flowers to girls who are sick, and keep track of all girls who leave school during the term.

The Girls' League of the Manual Arts High School, Los Angeles, California, has two main purposes: to encourage the spirit of helpfulness and friendship, and to stimulate scholarship. The

girls are divided into groups of about two hundred each. These are worked out so that there are girls of all grades in each group. Each section has a cabinet member and secretary. The girls' vice-president of the Student Body—the all-school organization—is president of the Girls' League. The section secretaries and cabinet members are her helpers. The girls hold assemblies of their own, maintain a system of "sponsors and sponsorettes," give parties for all the girls of the school, to which mothers are often invited. They try to keep track of the girls that leave school during the year.

In the Lincoln High School, Lincoln, Nebraska, the All Girls League, to which every girl of the school belongs, has a council of twelve members chosen at large by the girl members of the student council and presided over by the highest girl official of the student council. During the war the league organized Red Cross classes which turned out quantities of surgical dressings and even continued their organization during the summer. Last year they held two mass meetings at which problems of special interest to girls were discussed. In the spring they assisted the student standard club of the Y. W. C. A. in presenting a "style show" before all the girls of the school. They also were instrumental in starting a girls' athletic association which held contests in minor sports, swimming, baseball, basket-ball, tennis, and track athletics. The league has also organized a "big sister" movement to assist in welcoming the incoming girls each semester.

In addition to these organizations that are open to all the girls of the school, there should be all sorts of clubs open to girls on a tryout basis. These should include dramatic, debating or public-speaking clubs, musical, art, household arts, athletic, English, scientific, and business efficiency clubs. It is true that our pupils have been "clubbed" to death, but it is also true that they have not been "clubbed" in the right way. Too often, heretofore, the membership of all clubs was chosen for social availability.

Within the past year the need for constant athletic training for girls has been apparent. Girls are being asked to take up all manner of work hitherto done by men, but little provision has been made to keep them physically fit so that they will be equal to their tasks. It is possible so to organize the girls' athletic work in the high school that it will have a socializing influence on the girls. It has long

been felt that boys learned group loyalty and fair play through the team-work demanded in certain games. There is no reason why girls should not have the same advantage if a plan of athletics is worked out suitable to their needs.

These social organizations of the high school not only serve to satisfy the girls' social instincts, but can give them interests that will help them to spend their leisure hours wisely. Often it is through these organizations that the girls gain whatever appreciation they have of music, drama, and art. Through them also they may acquire the right social standards.